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RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3986
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0199
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4601
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0481
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0403
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0483
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4208
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2489
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0520
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7427
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1153
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 000604

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [KTIA](#) [PREL](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: ASSISTANCE TO WATER EXPERTS COULD
SERVE REGIONAL STABILITY GOALS

REF: A. BISHKEK 501

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 363

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On May 14, Ambassador met with representatives of the Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) to discuss regional water management policy. The water experts indicated that the demand for water in Central Asia has increased in recent decades, and that crop yields and GDP in western Uzbekistan have declined while soil salinity has increased. They also presented a series of databases and information resources the ICWC maintains. More effective and sustainable water usage in western Uzbekistan could mitigate probable discontent among the populace in western Uzbekistan.

In this light, modest United States Government financial assistance to the ICWC in distributing USG materials on effective and efficient water usage could serve our interest in promoting regional stability, including with respect to Afghanistan (hence we are also drawing this message to the attention of the Army Corps of Engineers). End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On May 14, Ambassador met with several experts on transboundary water issues from the Scientific Information Center (SIC) of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC). (Note: The ICWC is an intergovernmental organization of five Central Asian states that advises on regional water management policy, and the SIC collects and distributes information on transboundary water issues as well as performs research related to ICWC activities. End note.)

Growing Population and Demand for Water

13. (SBU) SIC ICWC Director Victor Dukhovny introduced several of his colleagues and provided an overview of the ICWC's core activities, which include raising public awareness of water issues, working with the international community, implementing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), research, capacity building, and training. He briefed the Ambassador on the dynamics of water use in Central Asia. The population of Central Asia has skyrocketed from about 14 million in 1960 to 45 million in 2006, and total water withdrawal and irrigated areas also have increased over this timeframe.

Some Success in Water Management

14. (SBU) Vadim Sokolov of the SIC ICWC provided a briefing on an Integrated Water Resource Management project in the Ferghana Valley funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and implemented by the SIC ICWC and the International Water Management Institute. The project is aimed at improving water and land productivity, and has already demonstrated success in promoting cooperation among farmers in the Ferghana Valley, improving regular delivery of water, and reducing water losses in the South Ferghana Valley Canal. He reported a 35 percent decrease in water losses thanks to this project. The Center now hopes to adapt the IWRM project to the lowlands around the Amu Darya and Syr Darya.

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15. (SBU) Pulatkhon Umarov discussed the role of the ICWC training center in developing regional cooperation in the Aral Sea basin. The training in Tashkent focuses on future leaders, and former participants have gone on to become political leaders. Thus, they have tried to attract not only agricultural specialists, but also other stakeholders such as representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice. Over 2,000 people have participated in ICWC regional seminars and around 250 trainers have been trained.

Decline in Crop Yields and GDP, Rise in Salinity

16. (SBU) Another briefing described several problems for downstream areas surrounding the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. First is the sharp decline in the productivity of agriculture since 1990. In Khorezm province, cotton yields declined from 3.5 tons per hectare in 1981-1985 to 1.6 tons per hectare in 2003. In Karakalpakstan, cotton yields dropped from 2.7 tons per hectare to 1.1 tons per hectare over the same timeframe. Second, soil salinity in lowland areas has more than doubled since the 1960s. Third, GDP has declined in Khorezm province and Karakalpakstan. In Khorezm, GDP declined from 495 million USD in 1995 to 369.2 million USD in 2003. In Karakalpakstan, GDP dropped from 658.1 million USD in 1995 to 175.8 million USD in 2003.

ICWC Databases an Important Source of Water-Related Information

17. (SBU) B. Turdibaev presented "CAREWIB," the ICWC's Regional Information Database of Central Asia's Water Sector. The main goal of CAREWIB, Turdibaev said, is improving awareness of water and ecological issues associated with the Aral Sea basin. Turdibaev also presented the web-portal cawater-info.net, which includes 15 websites, over 14,000 pages, and over 1 GB of information. The portal includes Central Asia news, a calendar of events, a catalog of water and ecological sites, several databases, and information about the Aral Sea, Amu Darya, Syr Darya, and water resources in Afghanistan.

Dukhovny Requests Assistance in Promoting Efficient Water Usage

18. (SBU) As the series of presentations drew to a close, SIC ICWC Director Dukhovny asked for Post's assistance in facilitating the translation of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's "Technical Guidelines for Irrigation Sustainability for Land Classification" into Russian, so it could be posted to the ICWC's website and so 100 hard copies of the manual could be distributed to key figures in transboundary water management.

Comment:

19. (C) Competition over access to water constitutes a significant soft security threat in Central Asia, and these

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discussions are particularly timely given recent press reports indicating that this will be a dry year for the region. The several briefings, the numerous databases the experts maintain, and the wealth of materials they provided to the Ambassador clearly show that there is no dearth of expertise in Tashkent on transboundary water issues. One key problem, it seems, is the lack of broader awareness of methods that could promote better water usage among Central Asian decisionmakers. Uzbekistan's outdated irrigation land classification system results in vast quantities of water used for irrigation being wasted. The United States has an opportunity here to act as a stabilizing force in Central Asia: limited financial assistance with translating the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's manual into Russian, for example, so that SIC ICWC can distribute it could contribute to regional stability. This could promote greater awareness among Uzbekistan's decisionmakers--who generally lack English language skills--on how to manage transboundary water more efficiently and effectively.

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